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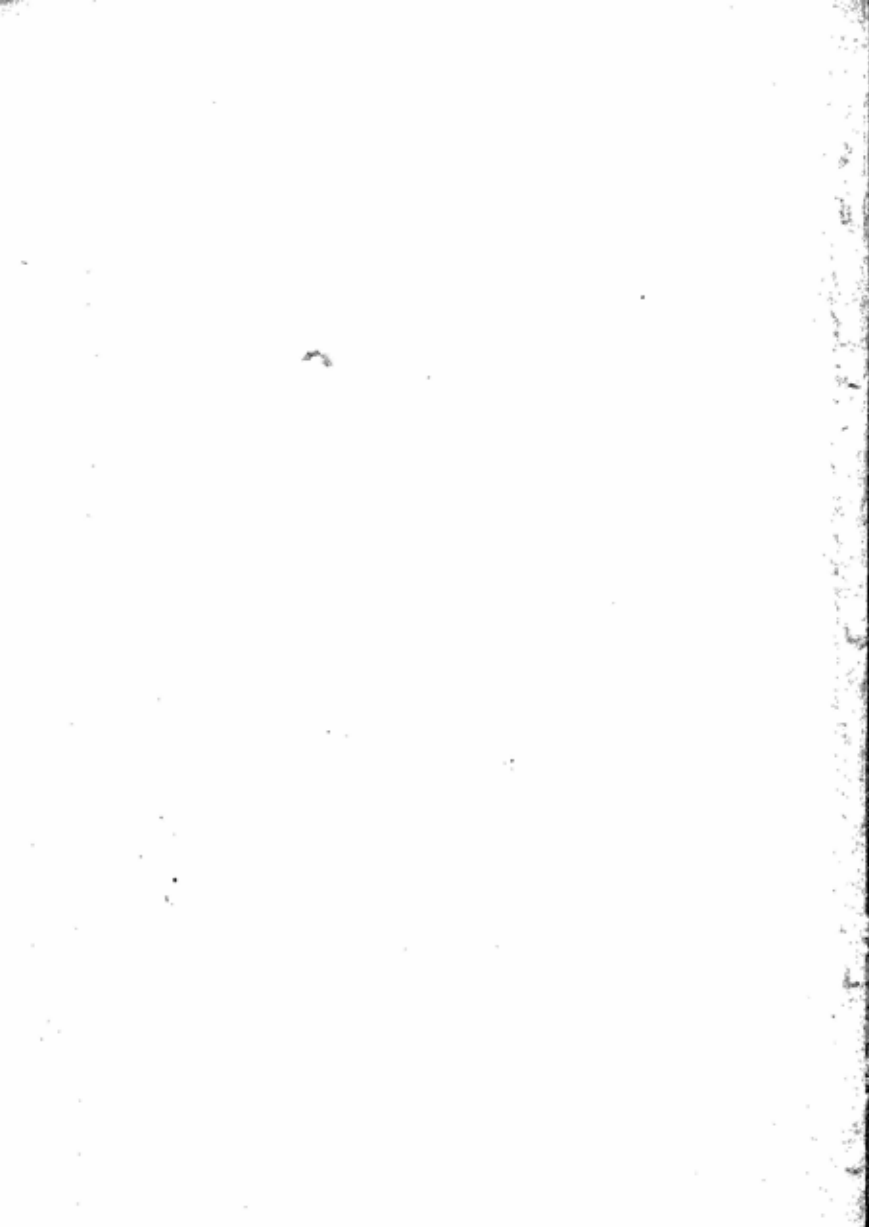
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EDITED BY  
L. CRANMER-BYNG  
DR. S. A. KAPADIA

THE PERSIAN MYSTICS  
'ATTĀR



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WISDOM OF THE EAST

# THE PERSIAN MYSTICS

## 'ATTĀR

BY MARGARET SMITH, M.A., PH.D.

AUTHOR OF

RĀBĪ'Ā THE MYSTIC AND HER FELLOW-SAINTS IN ISLĀM" AND  
STUDIES IN EARLY MYSTICISM IN THE NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST"



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# CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION :	
I. THE LIFE OF 'AṬṬĀR . . .	11
II. THE MYSTICAL DOCTRINE OF 'AṬṬĀR . . .	19
✓ III. THE STORY OF THE "MANṬIQ AL-ṬAYR" . . .	26
SELECTIONS FROM THE "MANṬIQ AL-ṬAYR" .	34
SELECTIONS FROM "TADHKIRAT AL- AWLIYĀ" . . .	65
SELECTIONS FROM THE "PANDNĀMA" .	85
SELECTIONS FROM THE "JAWHAR AL-DHĀT" .	90
SELECTIONS FROM OTHER WORKS THAN THE FOREGOING . . .	98

“Man has only to look within himself to find God.”

‘Aṭṭār.

## PREFATORY NOTE

FOR certain of my references I am indebted to Shaykh Azzam, of Cairo. I have also to express my thanks to the Literary Executors of the late Prof. E. G. Browne and the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press for permission to include two translations from the *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr*, by Prof. E. G. Browne (pp. 34, 60). I have also included two translations from the *Jawhar al-Dhāt* (pp. 95, 97), by R. A. Vaughan, given in his *Hours with the Mystics* (Parker & Son, London). Otherwise the translations are my own work.

MARGARET SMITH.

LONDON,  
October 1931.



## EDITORIAL NOTE

THE object of the Editors of this series is a very definite one. They desire above all things that, in their humble way, these books shall be the ambassadors of good-will and understanding between East and West—the old world of Thought and the new of Action. They are confident that a deeper knowledge of the great ideals and lofty philosophy of Oriental thought may help to a revival of that true spirit of Charity which neither despises nor fears the nations of another creed and colour.

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## INTRODUCTION

### I. THE LIFE OF 'AṬṬĀR

FARĪD AL-DĪN ABŪ ḤĀMID MUḤAMMAD B. IBRĀHĪM 'AṬṬĀR was born some time previous to A.D. 1150. His native biographers place the date of his birth as early as A.D. 1119-20, but this early date seems improbable, as it would make the poet at least a hundred and ten at the time of his death. He was born at Kadkan, a village near Nishāpūr, and hence was called Nishāpūrī, and it is to be noted that Khurāsān, and Nishāpūr in particular, have been famous as centres of Sūfī mysticism. Some of the greatest of the mystics of Islām, including the poet Abū Sa'īd b. Abī al-Khayr, and al-Ghazālī, the "Proof of Islām," belonged to this region.

The name 'Aṭṭār signifies one who deals in perfumes or drugs, especially *'itr* or otto of roses. The poet's father had followed this occupation, and the son succeeded to his business. To his mother, Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār seems to have been greatly attached; he speaks of the joy and satisfaction which he had in her company, and of her spiritual rank as a "Caliph in the Realm

of Religion," and it was no doubt from her that he inherited his strong inclination towards the religious life, though his father, who died before his son was old enough to be much influenced by him, was also a Şūfī. In addition to his trade in the sale of perfumes, 'Aṭṭār seems to have kept a sort of pharmacy, where he was consulted by patients, for whom he prescribed, and to whom he dispensed his own prescriptions. His clinic appears to have been frequented at one time by as many as five hundred patients in a day, and it was in his drug-store, he tells us, that he composed certain of his poems.

We do not know much of the course of his life, but he seems to have spent some years of his youth at Mashad, before he took up business in his druggist's shop. It was while he was engaged in selling perfumes and drugs that the call came to him to follow the religious life. Dawlatshāh, in his *Memoirs of the Poets*, relates that one day a dervish, who was far advanced in the spiritual life, came to the door of Shaykh Farīd al-Dīn's shop, and cast curious glances upon the treasures displayed there in such profusion; then his eyes were seen to fill with tears, while he gave vent to deep sighs. The Shaykh, disturbed by this unwonted visitor, bade him pass on his way and begone. The dervish in response said, "Sir, that is easily done. My baggage is light, for it consists only of this patched robe that I wear,

but for you, with these sacks full of precious drugs, when the time comes for you to depart hence, how will you take them with you? As for myself, I can depart quickly enough from the bazaar of this transient world, but as for you, you will need to occupy yourself well in advance with the arrangement of your packages and your baggage: it would be wise to ponder a little on your situation."

'Aṭṭār was profoundly affected by the words of the dervish, and his biographer says that his heart became "as cold as camphor." He gave up his shop, abandoned his profession, and entirely renounced all worldly affairs.

'Aṭṭār now turned his back on the world, and retired into a monastery under the spiritual direction of the venerable Shaykh Rukn al-Dīn Akkāf, a well-known contemplative, and became a novice under his guidance. 'Aṭṭār's manner of life was now completely changed, and he delivered himself over to the discipline of self-mortification, and the practice of works of devotion. He spent some years among the other disciples of Shaykh Rukn al-Dīn, and also during this period went on pilgrimage to Mecca. He appears to have travelled extensively at this time, as most of the great Ṣūfī teachers seem to have done at some period of their lives, before they settled down to teach or to write. 'Aṭṭār was no exception, and he visited Rayy, Kūfa,

Egypt, Damascus, India, and Turkistān, before returning to settle down in Nishāpūr. Of the asceticism and loneliness of his life at this time he tells us something in his own writings. He says, "I am consumed by sorrow of heart, and the graceless folk around me remain unheeding, so that I must needs sorrow alone. When I set forth dry bread upon my table, I moisten it with my tears. My meat is sorrow of heart, and yet at times I have Gabriel as my guest. Since the Holy Spirit Himself bears me company, why should I break bread with any mean companion? This dry bread of mine is sufficient for my nourishment and a contented heart gives fresh life to my soul. Truth is my treasure, which cannot pass away, and only he who possesses such a treasure is rich. Why should I put myself under an obligation to any ignoble wretch, or let him enslave my heart? Never have I eaten the food of any tyrant, nor dedicated any book of mine to such a one. It is the high purpose alone that I praise, and it is the strength of my spirit alone which gives sustenance to my body."

In the course of his travels, 'Aṭṭār made the acquaintance of a large number of men of God, Ṣūfī mystics and contemplatives, and for thirty-nine years he occupied himself in collecting the verses and sayings of the Ṣūfī saints, and securing information as to their lives and practice, so that he was reputed to have more knowledge of the

Šūfī philosophy, and the Šūfis themselves, than any author of his time. On account of his discourses, he was said to be the "scourge" of the Šūfī gnostics, because he urged them on to such lofty heights of knowledge and attainment, while we are told that "his burning zeal in the service of God became a bright lamp for the guidance of the divers for the pearls of truth in the sea of knowledge."

At the end of his life, 'Aṭṭār was living in complete retreat, his door opened to none, save those who sought his spiritual advice. There in his retreat he remained absorbed in the contemplation of the Divine Essence, until the deepest spiritual mysteries, truths the most impenetrable and inaccessible to man, were revealed and made clear to him, so that he attained "the most perfect degree of spirituality." His biographer wrote of him that he was "submerged in the ocean of the knowledge of God, and plunged in the sea of immediate experience of the Divine." Thus he came to the goal of the mystic's quest, that which is called "annihilation," which is the complete passing away of the personal self in the consciousness of the Divine, when the human spirit becomes one with the Eternal Spirit, the lover is united for ever with the Beloved, and the soul returns unto the Source from which it came forth.

Legend relates that 'Aṭṭār met his death at the hands of the Mongols during the sack of Nishāpūr

(A.D. 1229-30). He was said to have been taken captive by a Mongol, who was on the point of putting him to death when a second Mongol offered him a ransom of a thousand pieces of silver if he would spare the old man's life. 'Aṭṭār's captor was ready to accept the offer, but the poet told him that he was a man of importance, for whom someone else might offer a much higher ransom. So they went on their way, and a second time the Mongol was minded to kill his captive, and again a passer-by offered a ransom, this time of a sack of straw. "Accept his offer," said 'Aṭṭār, "for this is what I am worth," and this time the Mongol, enraged at his action, proceeded to put him to death. A religious devotee, who had witnessed the murder, was seized with ecstasy and exclaimed, "O Lord, those who are leaders in the Faith, and those who are in union with the Divine, fall one after the other into the hands of these invaders, and perish; and yet Thou doest naught on their behalf, but for my part, I am overcome with grief and wrath." So saying, he drew his sword, and other Muslims, attracted by his courage, also took their swords in their hands and succeeded in putting the Mongols to flight, and so saved their own lives and their nation.

'Aṭṭār's tomb was outside the gate of Shadbakh. The original shrine over it later fell into ruins, but the Amīr 'Alī Shīr restored it and built a beautiful monument over the grave.

'Aṭṭār must have applied the greater part of his long life to literary work. He wrote twenty long works, of which his *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā* (The Memoirs of the Saints), is the only one written in prose, and he also wrote an important and extensive Diwān of short poems. Though greatly renowned as a poet, he has as great a reputation for his philosophic and mystical teaching, and practically all his work is to be interpreted in the light of mysticism. One of his latest writings, a poem entitled *Mazhar al-'Ajā'ib* (The Manifestation of Wonders) aroused the wrath of an orthodox theologian of Samarqand, who caused the book to be burned, and denounced the author on a charge of heresy, and in consequence 'Aṭṭār's house was attacked and burned.

'Aṭṭār's chief works, in addition to the *Memoirs of the Saints*, in which he incorporates the vast store of information concerning the lives and teachings of the Ṣūfīs which he had accumulated during his long investigation, include the *Pandnāma* (The Book of Counsels), a little moral treatise, very austere in tone, which is practical as well as mystical in its teaching. The best-known of his poems is the *Manṭiq al-Ṭayr* (The Discourse of the Birds), an allegory dealing with the mystic Way, and the attainment of the Goal of the Quest. Other long poems full of mystical meaning are the *Jawhar al-Dhāt* (The Inner Nature of the Divine Essence), the *Asrār*



*Nāma* (The Book of Mysteries), and the *Ilāhī Nāma* (The Book of Divine Knowledge).

'Aṭṭār's teaching was greatly appreciated even in his own lifetime. Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, as a child, is said to have received 'Aṭṭār's blessing, and been presented with his *Asrār Nāma*; and Rūmī afterwards considered himself to be a disciple of the earlier mystic, and spoke of himself as a planet revolving about his sun, for 'Aṭṭār, he said, had drunk a draught of wine from the hand of the Sun. He also said of 'Aṭṭār, "He was the soul of the (Ṣūfī) Doctrine and traversed the seven cities of Love, while we are still at the turning of one street." Again Rūmī said that the light of Ḥallāj, the great Ṣūfī teacher and martyr, who was put to death in A.D. 922, was manifested in 'Aṭṭār, and was to him illumination and guidance. Of 'Aṭṭār in relation to the great mystic poet Sanā'ī, author of the *Ḥadiqat al-Ḥaqīqa* (The Garden of Truth), Rūmī said further that "'Aṭṭār was the Spirit, and Sanā'ī its two eyes. I came after both of them."

A Ṣūfī, who was asked his opinion of the respective merits of 'Aṭṭār and Rūmī, said, "The former flew up like an eagle to the height of perfection, in the twinkling of an eye; the latter reached the same summit, but it was by slow and persevering progress." Another Ṣūfī poet, Maḥmūd Shabistārī, the writer of the *Gulshan-i Rāz* (The Rose-Garden of Mystery), said of him that the

like of 'Aṭṭār would not come again for a hundred centuries. The poet Kātibī of Nīshāpūr, who flourished some two centuries after 'Aṭṭār, wrote, "Like 'Aṭṭār I am from the Rose-garden of Nīshāpūr, but I am the thorn of Nīshāpūr and he was the rose."

## II. THE MYSTICAL DOCTRINE OF 'Aṭṭār

What we call Mysticism represents an attitude of mind which is intensely and continuously aware of the unity of all Reality, whether that Reality be called the Divine Essence, the Eternal Wisdom, Unclouded Light, Beauty Supreme, Perfect Love, or simply, God. The mystic holds that God contains everything, and yet transcends all things. He is the One in Whom all is lost and also the One in Whom all is found. Mysticism means, therefore, a constant awareness of the all-pervading Presence of God, but it seeks to go farther still, and to arrive at a knowledge of the One Reality. To the mystic, no other relation matters compared with the relation of the soul to God, and so mysticism aims at the attainment of an immediate, direct apprehension by the human of the Divine, in which the soul shall in truth become one with God. The mystic claims that this is possible because the soul is itself Divine in origin; only the real can know Reality, and only the god-like can find God.

If the soul is related to God, then is God also related to the soul. But the soul, tied to a material body, dwelling in a material world, has wandered far from its Source, and the way of return, the path of ascent, to its home in God, is long and arduous. Only by purification and self-stripping can the soul hope to tear aside the veils between itself and the All-Holy, and to see clearly the Divine Vision. Only that soul which, by ceasing to think of self, has passed beyond itself can enter into that abiding state of Union with the One.

There is but one key to unlock the door, but one inspiration and motive-power strong enough to lead the soul through all trials and all sacrifices, until at last it reaches the goal of its Quest, and that power is Love—Love, disinterested and all-absorbing, that “fire in the heart consuming all save the Will of the Beloved,” that Love which has “set the soul on fire and transmuted it into Love, has annihilated and destroyed it to all that is not Love.” That passion of Love for God will lead the mystic onward and upward, until, purged as by fire from all the dross of self and self-seeking, the soul can look upon God face to face, and become one with that Supreme Reality, Which is also Everlasting Love.

‘Aṭṭār, in his mystical teaching concerning the nature of the Godhead, says that the Divine Essence is beyond human conception, and all that men say of God is but the result of their

own imaginary ideas of Him, for He is Incomparable, and therefore Unknowable and Incomprehensible by the human reason, which knows little enough about itself, and how then can it hope to know the Ineffable Essence? Yet, even in His Essence, that is, as He truly is, God can be known through love and ecstasy, for these are His own gifts, and in them He reveals Himself. The Divine Attributes can be known, for by them God is manifested in the Universe. God, to 'Aṭṭār, is the Sole Source of all existence; everything is God and there is no other existence but God. All is the Essence of the Incomparable Lord, from His Essence He created all things. He is Infinite, without limit or end, and therefore nothing else can exist, for nothing can remain outside of the Infinite. The universe is the reflection of His Perfection, for God is to the world as Essence to attributes. He is a hidden treasure, and the visible world is a means whereby we may discover Him. Those who take pains really to understand the universe will find that God is the hidden Truth behind it. Evil is non-existent, because all comes from God: what we call good and evil are both from Him, therefore nothing should be regarded as evil, for everything comes from Him, and therefore everything is good.

God is not only Being but Will. He is the sole Agent, the Motive-power of all action. His power is at work in every atom, says 'Aṭṭār, and He is

in truth the Spirit and Life of the world. He is the infinite fathomless Sea, in which every drop is longing to manifest itself ; and the whole universe is but a drop in that boundless sea of the Unity. God is also the Sun which shines upon every atom, and gives light to it both without and within, a wondrous, incomparable Light, the splendour of which is revealed even through a hundred thousand veils. As God is the Source of all movement, so also is He the Goal towards which all things move. Everything is yearning for Him: the drop longs for the Sea whence it came forth, the spark for the Flame whence it had its origin. The universe is crying aloud for God, the heart is athirst for Him, all creatures are seeking for Him ; all movement and all activity within the universe, the very motions of the spheres, all arise from this yearning search for the Divine, Which is thus for ever drawing back again to Itself those souls which are indeed a part of Itself, which have for a brief while been parted from their Source, but which must return again to become one with the Whole.

In his teaching, then, on the nature of the soul and its relation to God, 'Aṭṭār makes plain his belief that man is made in the image of God, and that the human soul is derived from the Divine Essence. Within the human spirit is a Divine treasure hidden, which is of the essence of the Divine mysteries, and therefore when God willed

to manifest Himself through man, He revealed thereby many of the secrets of Reality. God is therefore the Life of the soul, and it is this which makes it real. Man is, in truth, the only real existence in the universe ; all else is unreal, for he alone has Divinity within him, he alone shares in the Essence of the Sole Reality. But this Divinity dwells within a material body, the spirit is attached to matter, and so man in this perishable world is in fetters and afflicted, his soul is like a bird within a cage, which is ever striving to burst its bonds and to fly forth, up to the heavens and the serried ranks of the stars.

The soul, then, must find its way back to its native home in God, it must seek to break loose from the fetters of the body, from its attachment to gross matter and to this phenomenal world, and must wing its way back to that incomparable realm of the Divine, where the spirit of man shall become one again with the Eternal Spirit of God. For man, says 'Aṭṭār, there is an ascent of the soul, whereby it may attain to the Light of lights ; all else is mortal, perishable, and transient, but the human soul is immortal and shall abide for ever in God.

But the Way is long and hard, and the Quest for Eternal Life must be pursued with ceaseless striving and effort until, through pain, weariness, and darkness, the soul finds peace and light in the Presence of God. Yet the goal is not to be

attained by the efforts of the soul alone : it needs the grace of God to help it on its forward way, and without that grace and help, and the Divine guidance, it will fall back and perish. Only in humble reliance on the Divine aid can the soul hope that by its efforts it will attain, for all is the gift of God. The seeker said, " I put my heart and soul at Thy service, all that I had I scattered for Thy sake," and God said to him, " What art thou ? What dost thou do or leave undone ? It was I Who roused thee to be up and doing." And even when the soul has listened to the call, and the traveller has set his face towards the goal, the difficulties are so great as to be almost insurmountable. " When you have travelled on the road of God for a hundred centuries, you will find yourself still at the first step." It is a trackless desert Path, in which are no signs to give guidance to the bewildered traveller ; in this Road the only sign is that no sign is to be seen. The shadow seeks to attain to union with the Sun. That may be possible, says 'Aṭṭār, but the impossibility must be borne in mind. On this mystic Way, there are stages to be traversed, halting-places for the traveller, and only when each stage has been traversed, and the qualities proper to it acquired, must the traveller proceed to a higher stage, and the time taken to traverse each stage depends on the traveller's spiritual capacity and equipment for the journey. But

from time to time God may grant him the grace of illumination, and he will know the joy of ecstasy, to cheer him on his way and encourage him to face fresh toils and trials.

Yet all the difficulties may be overcome by Love, for Love is the solution of the insoluble ; where reason fails, Love will triumph, and where earthly knowledge is powerless to help, Love will prove all-availing. Though you possess all the knowledge in the world, says 'Aṭṭār, if you are without Love you do not know the first letter of the alphabet in this realm of the spirit. It is Love which leads the traveller ever onward and inspires him to endure all things for the sake of attaining his end, the vision of the Beloved face to face, and abiding union with Him. For Love means self-stripping, the passing away from self, the cutting off of all ties which bind the soul to this material world, and which distract it from pre-occupation with the Beloved, and of all hindrances which hamper it on the Way. "If you would seek God," writes 'Aṭṭār, "cut yourself off from wife and child, sever all the bonds that tie you to mankind. Everything which you desire is a fetter to you : how can you travel in fetters ? " It is Love which gives the power to die to self, and Love which is the guide to the Beloved. "Love draws aside the veil," 'Aṭṭār writes, "for it sees Thee, and knows itself to be one with Thee," that Love which is all-consuming,



in which the desires of the senses, and the self, shrivel up and are burnt away, like the moth in the flame of the candle, and in that passing away the soul becomes one with the Object of its desire.

So, at last, through Love, the mystic attains to the end of the Quest, and in dying to self he finds Eternal Life. Now he knows that the Centre is within him, now he sees no longer his own reality, but only the Essence of God. He has passed away from himself, from the stages and the states, from the world of phenomenal existence, from the transient and the perishable—from mortality he has passed into immortality, from death into the Everlasting Life in God.

### III. THE STORY OF THE "MANTĪQ AL-ṬAYR"

The *Mantīq al-Ṭayr* (The Discourse of the Birds) is the most famous of all 'Aṭṭār's poems. It is a mystical allegory representing the slow and arduous journey of the Ṣūfī mystic through all the trials and difficulties of the Path which leads him to God. It tells also of the final attainment, when he reaches his goal, and passes into the Presence of God, only to find that he is in reality one with God, and in that consciousness of union with the Divine, he attains to immortality. The poem contains a number of independent stories, each having a moral or mystical significance.

At the beginning the poem tells how all the birds, having gathered together, express their desire to have a king for themselves. The Hoopoe (*hudhud*), renowned above all the birds, because she was chosen by King Solomon to be his messenger to the Queen of Sheba, and who in token of her dignity wears the crest of spiritual knowledge on her breast, and a crown, the reward of piety, upon her head, tells them that they already have a sovereign, to whom they owe allegiance.

His name is Simurgh (lit. Thirty Birds), and he is the king of all the birds. He is near to them, but they are far from him. He is such as to be beyond all description, and though it is hard to find the way to him, yet none of his subjects can rest without him. Those who go in search of him will meet with many difficulties on the way, and great courage and vigour and self-sacrifice will be needed to accomplish the journey, and yet to fail to find him is to spend one's life in vain. There are Seven Valleys to be crossed in order to reach the place of his abode, and the journey across these valleys means great risk and many adventures.

The birds, on hearing all this, expressed their desire to undertake the quest, and to travel to that mythical mountain Kāf, where dwelt their king, the All-Wise Simurgh, and do homage to him. Because of her wisdom and knowledge of Divine

things, they chose the Hoopoe as their leader and guide.

But when she proceeded to describe to them in detail the difficulties and dangers of the way, the enthusiasm of the birds began to wane, and their courage failed them. One after another, they began to make their excuses. The Nightingale spoke of his love for the Rose, from whom he could not bear to be parted, but the Hoopoe bade him look upon the fadeless Beauty of that which is eternal, rather than that which is but transient and perishes anon. The Parrot declared that it was held captive in a cage, and was not free to go. The Peacock pleaded his unworthiness for so high a Quest, because he had had a share in driving out Adam from Paradise. The Duck claimed that it must have water if it was to be happy, and the Partridge that it needed its mountains. The Heron desired the lagoons where it was accustomed to wade in search of fish, the Owl wanted the ruins which it was wont to haunt. The Falcon did not wish to forego its privilege of resting on the King's wrist when he went forth to hunt, while the Wagtail held that it was a feeble creature, and had not the strength necessary for such a journey.

All these excuses, which represent the weakness of human beings in the pursuit of spiritual things, were dealt with by the Hoopoe, who showed, by various illustrations and anecdotes, that they were

unworthy of being sustained. The birds, put to shame by her rebukes, asked her to explain what was their real relation to the Simurgh, and she told them how the Simurgh had once removed the veil from his face, and the rays of light which then issued from his countenance were changed into birds, so that in truth they were all one in essence with him. The Hoopoe then told them of the Seven Valleys which they must cross.

The first of the Seven is the Valley of Search, in which the traveller meets with infinite difficulties and has to face all kinds of trials and calamities. At this stage, he must renounce all earthly things and detach himself from all that exists. When he has arrived at complete self-loss and is purified from all earthly ties, then the traveller will be illuminated by the Divine Light. He will see his quest to be not one but a thousand, but the Eternal Cup-Bearer will give him to drink of the wine of forgetfulness and he will go on his way, heedless of all the dangers that beset him.

The second is the Valley of Love, in which the soul of the traveller is consumed as with fire, in his desire to attain to his Beloved. That which may befall him matters naught; for him, evil and good have ceased to exist. He can no longer reason, for reason is to Love as the smoke to the fire, valueless and without reality. The traveller would fain be possessed of hundreds of thousands

of lives that he might cast them all away for the sake of Love.

The third valley is that of Knowledge, which has neither beginning nor end. Here the sun of Gnosis shines forth, and each traveller receives illumination according to his spiritual capacity for the reception of that light. Now are countless secrets revealed, and mysteries unveiled, but thousands are lost on the way for one who attains to complete apprehension. He who has apprehended no longer sees himself, but only his Beloved. Wherever he looks, he sees always the Face of God.

The fourth stage is the Valley of Detachment, where the traveller finds himself free from all attachments, even from the desire to know the Divine secrets. There he realises the Infinity of God, and the Divine Glory which envelops all things, and compared with which all else is as nothing.

The fifth valley is that of Unification, where everything is unified, and the Unity is therefore complete. There is no longer any distinction of number or attribute, no place for death or life, time or eternity. Here Real Being will become manifest, and since God is One, comprehending all things, and without beginning or end, for He was from everlasting and will be to eternity, nothing exists save Him. "When everything is One, cease to speak of 'two.' Here there is no 'I' nor 'Thou.'"

The sixth valley is the Valley of Bewilderment, for the traveller, having apprehended the Unity, loses himself completely, since he has ceased to be aware of himself. Whoever is conscious within his soul of the Unity, loses all things and himself. If he were asked, "Are you existent or not? Are you within or without? Manifest or hidden? Annihilated or subsistent?" he would say that he knows nothing and does not even know whether he knows. He knows that he loves, but knows not whom. Nor does he know whether he is Muslim or infidel. What is he then? He is hardly aware whether he loves or no, for his heart is full and empty of love, at one and the same time.

The seventh and last valley is the Valley of Annihilation, which passes all description. It means forgetfulness, dumbness, deafness, and stupefaction. He who loses himself there in the Ocean of Infinity is lost for ever in self-annihilation and is at rest. There, in the waters of tranquillity, he finds naught but oblivion. He who sinks into that Ocean will no longer manifest his own existence; he is, and he is not.

Of all the birds who set out on the Quest, to traverse the Seven Valleys, only thirty survived the privations and temptations of the way and succeeded in completing the journey to the abode of the Simurgh. These thirty birds, purified by

their trials, but weary, travel-stained, and heart-broken, presented themselves at the threshold of the King's Palace, only to find themselves bidden by the chamberlain to return whence they had come, because they were too insignificant and unworthy to enter into the Presence of the King. The birds, stricken to the heart by this rebuff, submitted that their love for the King was like that of the moth for the candle-flame, and sooner would they stay and be altogether consumed by their love than depart without attaining the object of their Quest. Then, at last, came the chamberlain of Grace, and by him they were admitted into the Royal Presence, and the Light of the Divine Glory was manifested to them, and they were allowed to approach the King. After this each one was given a record of his deeds, and on the perusal of this record they were so overcome by shame and remorse that they became completely annihilated and their bodies were reduced to dust.

But after death came resurrection ; being thus purified and freed from all earthly elements, they were enlightened by the Eternal Sun and their souls transformed into its light. The birds saw the Simurgh in the reflection of their own faces, and at last saw themselves and the Simurgh to be one. The Simurgh was the thirty birds, and they were the Simurgh, and they and He formed but One Being. Then the birds lost themselves for

ever in the Sîmurgh, and the shadows vanished in the Sun.

So the mystic, who has trodden the Path to the end, passes away from himself and enters into union with the Divine, the part becomes one with the Whole, and the One in all becomes the One and All.



# THE PERSIAN MYSTICS

## ‘AṬṬĀR

SELECTIONS FROM “MANTIḤ AL-  
ṬAYR”

### THE FIRST MANIFESTATION OF THE SĪMURGH

WHEN first the Sīmurgh, radiant in the night,  
Passed o’er the land of China in its flight,  
A feather from its wing on Chinese soil  
Fell, and the world in tumult did embroil,  
Each one did strive that feather to portray;  
Who saw these sketches, fell to work straightway.  
In China’s Picture-hall that feather is.  
“Seek knowledge e’en in China,”<sup>1</sup> points to this.  
Had not mankind the feather’s portrait seen,  
Such strife throughout the world would ne’er  
have been.

Its praise hath neither end nor origin :  
Unto what end its praise shall we begin ?

<sup>1</sup> A well-known traditional saying of the Prophet Muḥammad.

## THE WORLD ACCORDING TO A ṢŪFĪ

A Ṣūfī ecstatic began to weep in the middle of the night and said : " This is what I see the world to be : it is like a closed casket in which we are placed and wherein we spend our time, through our ignorance, in folly. When Death opens the lid of the casket, each one who has wings takes his flight to Eternity, but he who is without wings, remains in the casket, a prey to a thousand afflictions.

Give then, to the bird of spiritual desire, the wing of the mystic sense : give a heart to Reason, and ecstasy to the soul. Before the lid is taken away from this casket, become a bird of the Way to God, and develop your wings and your feathers. Nay, rather, burn your wings and your feathers, and destroy yourself by fire, and so will you arrive at the Goal before all others.

## THE STORY OF MAḤMŪD AND AYĀZ

One day the Sultan Maḥmūd called his favourite slave Ayāz, and when he had handed over to him his crown, he placed Ayāz on the throne and said to him : " I give unto thee my kingdom and my army : be thou sovereign, for this country is thine. It is my will that thou shouldst be king and shouldst cast to the Moon and the Fish the ear-ring of slavery."

When all the soldiers, both cavalry and infantry, heard these words, their eyes became dark with jealousy. "Never in the world," they cried, "has any king done a slave so much honour!" But the wise Ayāz, on the contrary, fell to weeping forthwith when he heard the Sultan's decree, whereupon they all said to him: "Thou art mad and knowest not what thou doest; thou hast surely lost thy reason. Since thou hast achieved royalty, O slave, why weepest thus? Sit thee down and rejoice."

But Ayāz replied to them without hesitation. "Ye are far from the Way of truth, for ye do not comprehend that the king of the great Assembly is sending me away from himself. He gives me work to do in the midst of the army, so that I may remain separated from him. Although the supreme king gives me the government of his kingdom, yet I, for my part, would not wish to be absent from him for even the briefest space of time. All that he commands, I must needs do, yet, if the choice were left to me, I would fain be always near to his side. What concern have I with his kingdom and the rule over it? My kingdom consists in the sight of his countenance."

If thou art a seeker, and knowest the Truth, learn from Ayāz how to serve God. O thou who remainest idle, concerned only by night and by day with thy primary desires, whilst each night, to set thee an example, Ayāz descends from the

summit of power ; like an ill-mannered boor, thou dost not move from thy place, nor experience any spiritual desire, by night or by day. Alas, thou art no true man. To whom wilt thou tell thy sorrow at the end ?

So long as Paradise and Hell are in thy road, how can thy spirit recognise the secret I announce to thee ? But when thou dost cast aside these two altogether, the dawn of this joy will arise from the night. The garden of Paradise is not for such as thee, it is reserved for the spiritually-minded. Like them, renounce both Paradise and Hell, and pass beyond them both. When thou shalt have renounced them both, and become separated therefrom, then, even though thou be a woman, thou wilt become a man in very truth.

### STORY OF RĀBĪ'A OF BAṢRA

A man who was beside himself with ecstasy addressed God, saying, " O my Lord, I pray Thee that now at last Thou wilt open the door to me that I may attain to Thy Presence." Rābī'a, the woman-mystic of Baṣra, who happened to be sitting near, said to him : " O heedless one, is His door in truth ever closed ? Stretch out thine hand, my son, thou hast but to turn thy face towards this door, and to proceed on thy way, to attain thy desire."

## THE TWO WORLDS

A devotee who spent his life in the contemplation of God was asked : " What are these two worlds of which we think so much ? " He replied : " The world above and this world beneath are like a drop of water which is and yet is not. At the beginning the universe appeared as a drop of water, which displayed upon its surface many reflections, but every reflection which we see upon the face of the water, even though it be of iron, will pass away. There is nothing more enduring than iron, and yet thou must see that its sole basis is the water. But all which has water for a foundation, even though it be of iron, has no more reality than a dream. None can conceive of water as a stable thing. How, then, should aught that is based upon water stand fast or abide ? "

## THE SHAYKH AND THE DOG

An unclean dog sat himself down beside a shaykh, who did not withdraw the skirt of his robe from him. Someone said to him : " O you who are distinguished for the purity of your life, why do you not protect yourself against the defilement of this dog ? " " This dog," replied the shaykh, " is outwardly unclean, but he does not appear to be so to my inner self. That un-

cleanness which is manifested outwardly in regard to him, in me is hidden within my inmost self. Since my inward part is like the exterior of the dog, why should I have an aversion to him, seeing that he and I are alike in that? Since the smallest thing forms an obstacle to your progress on the Way, what matter whether you are checked by a mountain or a straw?"

### IBRĀHĪM B. ADHAM AND POVERTY

A certain man was constantly bewailing his state and complaining of his poverty. Ibrāhīm b. Adham said to him: "My son, it may be that you paid but little for your poverty?" "You are talking nonsense," replied the man. "You should be ashamed of yourself. Does anyone buy poverty?"

Adham responded: "For my part, I chose it of my own free will, nay more, I bought it at the price of this world's sovereignty, and I would buy one instant of this poverty again with a hundred worlds, for every moment it becomes worth yet more to me. When I found this precious merchandise, I bade a final farewell to royalty. Without any doubt, I know the value of poverty, while you remain in ignorance of it. I give thanks for it, while you are ungrateful. Those who aspire to spiritual things are willing to stake both body and soul, and they spend their

years consumed by their love to God, The bird of their ambition has attained to fellowship with Him ; it has soared beyond temporal things and spiritual things alike. If you are not man enough for such an ambition, get you gone, for you are unworthy to be a partaker of the Divine grace."

### THE ŞŪFĪ AND THE PALACE

A certain king built for himself a palace adorned with much gilding, for the construction of which he paid one thousand dinars. When the decorations of this palace, like unto Paradise, were complete, it was embellished still further by the display of precious rugs. From every direction there came people to present their homage to the king and to bring him gifts, which they offered to him upon salvers. The king then summoned his great men and chosen companions to come to him, and when they were seated, he said to them : "What do you think of this palace of mine ? Is there anything left to desire in the way of beauty and perfection ?" All of them united in saying, "None has ever seen or will see such a palace on the face of the earth."

Thereupon a religious devotee rose up and said : "O thou favourite of Fortune, there is one breach remaining in this palace, and it constitutes a great defect. If the palace were not spoilt by this fault, it would serve as a gift for Paradise itself

and the invisible world." "I do not see this breach," said the king. "You are an ignorant man and you are seeking to stir up trouble." The Ṣūfī responded: "O thou who art filled with pride because of thy royalty, know that the gap of which I speak is that by which the Angel of Death will pass through. Would that thou couldst close this gap, for otherwise of what use is this palace, or thy crown, or this throne? Although this palace be delightful as Paradise, death will make it disagreeable in thine eyes. Nothing endures in this life of ours, and what art can render enduring that which is not so? Ah, be not too complaisant over this thy palace and thy castle: let not the steed of Self rear thus proudly. If, by reason of thine exalted position and thy dignity, none makes known to thee thy faults, woe is thee!"

### THE VALLEY OF SEARCH

In this valley, when thine heart has been cleansed from all that leads to destruction, it will behold the pure Light of God's Presence, and when that Light shines upon the heart, within thy soul will one desire become a thousand. A thousand steep valleys will appear, and the traveller, beside himself with love, will seek, like the moth, to fling himself into the flame. He will ask for a draught from the Eternal Cup-Bearer,



a draught of that wine which, when he has drunk it, will make him forgetful of both worlds.

Plunged in the Ocean, yet he remains dry-lipped : he must seek the secret of the Beloved from his own soul. In his desire to know that secret, he does not fear to attack the dragons of the soul. If infidelity and faith present themselves together to him, he will receive them with equal willingness, provided that they open the door to him, whereby he may attain his end. When that door is opened, what matter infidelity or faith ? For he is no longer concerned with one or the other.

### THE SAINT'S DREAM

A saint once dreamt that while he was walking in the Path of God, an angel met him, and asked him whither he was going, and the saint replied : " I am on my way to the Royal Presence." Said the angel, " You are so much concerned with worldly affairs, and you are encumbered with so great riches and possessions ; how can you hope to be admitted to the Presence of the King, with so many burdens to hamper you ? "

So the saint cast away all that he had, except a single blanket wherewith to protect himself from the weather, and to serve him as a covering. The next night he dreamt that he saw the angel again, and was asked the same question, and again he replied that he was on his way to the abode

of the Lord of All. The angel said to him, "O wise man, how can you expect to reach it, while you have this blanket? It is the greatest hindrance to your progress."

When the saint awoke from his dream, he put the blanket on the fire and burnt it.

On the third night, he saw the angel yet again, and the angel spoke again to him. "O thou of unspotted life," he said, "where art thou going now?" And the saint answered as before, "I go to seek the Creator of the Universe."

"O chosen one," said the angel then, "now that thou hast cast away all that thou hadst, remain here where thou art. It needs not that thou shouldst go in search of thy Lord, for He Himself will come to thee."

## THE WISE MAN AND THE OCEAN

One who was versed in spiritual things went down to the Ocean and said to it: "O thou Ocean, wherefore dost wear this robe of blue?<sup>1</sup> Why art thou clothed thus with a mourning garment? There is no fire to be seen, why art thou boiling thus?"

Then the Ocean made reply to that man of spiritual insight: "I am in anguish because of separation from my Beloved. Since, by reason of my shortcomings, I am not worthy of Him,

<sup>1</sup> Blue represents the colour of mourning in the East.

#### 44 THE PERSIAN MYSTICS: 'AṬṬĀR

I have clad myself in a vesture of blue as a sign of my grief for Him. Griefstricken I remain, with lips for ever parched with thirst, and the turbulence of my waves is due to the burning flame of my love. Could I attain to but one drop of water from the river which flows through His Paradise, then should I dwell for ever, immortal within His courts. Without that water of life for which I crave, I shall perish of my longing for Him, like the thousands who die in anguish, day and night, in their search for Him."

#### A STORY OF BĀYAZĪD BISTĀMĪ

It is related that one night Shaykh Bāyazīd went outside the city and found everything wrapped in a deep silence, free from the clamour of men. The moon was shedding her radiance upon the world, and by her light made night as brilliant as the day. Stars innumerable shone like jewels in the heavens above, each pursuing its appointed task. For a long time the Shaykh walked across the open country, without finding the least movement therein, and without seeing a single soul. He felt profoundly moved by the fact and said: "O Lord, my heart is stirred within me by this Thy Court displayed in all its splendour and sublimity, yet none are found here to give Thee the adoring worship which is Thy due. Why should this be, O Lord?"

Then spake to him the Hidden Voice of God :  
 "O thou who art bewildered in the Way, know that  
 the King does not grant admission to every  
 passer-by. So exalted is the Majesty of this court  
 that not every beggar can be admitted thereto.  
 When the Splendour of My Glory sheds abroad  
 its radiance from this My sanctuary, the heedless  
 and those who are wrapped in the sleep of indolence  
 are repelled thereby. Those who are worthy  
 of admittance to this court wait for long years,  
 until one in a thousand of them wins entrance  
 thereto."

### THE VALLEY OF LOVE

He who arrives in the Valley of Love is plunged  
 into fire, for he who is in this Valley has become  
 all fire : he who is not fire cannot dwell happily  
 there. The true lover is he who resembles fire :  
 his countenance will be radiant, and he will bear  
 himself erect as flame. Not for a moment will  
 he be concerned for consequences ; gladly will  
 he cast away a hundred worlds into the flames,  
 for he knows neither infidelity nor faith, neither  
 doubt nor certainty. Good and evil are all  
 one to him as he goes on the Way, for Love has  
 transcended both. But to him who is heedless,  
 this discourse will be meaningless. He who  
 is pure stakes all that he has for the sake of  
 attaining to union with the Beloved ; for others

is the promise of to-morrow, but he requires fulfilment now.

Until his self has been wholly consumed away, he cannot be free from the grief which overwhelms him. So long as the substance of thine own existence remains unconsumed, how can the heart rejoice in happiness? The lover strives unceasingly, being consumed and melted in the fire, until suddenly he arrives again at his own abode. A fish, when it is cast out of the sea on to the dry land, struggles until it falls back into the water.

Love in that Valley is flame, and reason is naught but smoke. When Love is kindled into flame, reason takes to flight. Reason cannot continue to exist alongside of Love's madness, for Love has nothing to do with human reason. If thou dost attain to an unhindered view of the Invisible, there alone wilt thou perceive whence is the origin of Love. The existence of every single blade of grass is derived from the existence of Love: all things are overwhelmed by the intoxication of Love. If thou hadst the vision whereby to penetrate to the Invisible, all the atoms of this visible world would become unveiled to thine understanding. But if thou seest only with the eye of Reason, thou wilt never wholly comprehend Love. Only that man who has been tried by experience, and who is truly free, is worthy of Love. Thou who hast passed through no such trial art no lover, thou art spiritually

dead, and how canst thou be worthy of Love ?

He who would tread this Path must have a hundred thousand living hearts, so that with every breath he may cast away a hundred of them.

### ADAM AND PARADISE

A disciple asked of his master : " Why was Adam driven out of Paradise ? " His master replied : " Adam was the most noble of all God's creatures, and when he entered Paradise, he heard the voice of God speaking unto him and saying : " O thou who art bound by a hundred ties to this earthly Paradise, know that whosoever in the two worlds concerns himself with aught but Myself, I detach him from all material things, so that he may attach himself to Me, his Friend, alone. What is one soul in comparison with thousands of souls ? But of what use is any soul apart from the Beloved ? He who has lived for aught else but the Beloved, were he Adam himself, must be rejected. Those who dwell in Paradise know that the first thing they must give is their heart, but if they are not worthy to know the Divine secrets and to remain in Paradise, they will recoil before the sacrifice of their hearts."

### THE FAITH OF THE LOVER

The lover thinks naught of his own life, for he who is a lover, whether he be an ascetic or a

libertine, is prepared to sacrifice his life for the sake of Love. If your spirit is at enmity with your soul, sacrifice your soul, and you will be able to go on your way unhindered. If your soul is a distraction to you on the road, cast it aside, then look straight before you and give yourself to contemplation. If you are bidden to renounce your faith or to give up your life, cast away both : abandon your faith, and sacrifice your life. If one who is ignorant of spiritual things should say to you that it is untrue that Love should be preferred to infidelity or faith, say to him : "What has Love to do with infidelity or faith ? Do lovers concern themselves with their souls ? A lover sets fire to the whole harvest : he puts the knife to his own throat, and pierces his own body. Torment and affliction are what pertain to Love : Love expects difficult things. He who has his foot set firmly in the abode of Love renounces at once both infidelity and faith."

### STORY OF A FRIEND OF GOD

One of the friends of God wept as he was about to die. They asked him the reason. "I weep," he said, "like the cloud in Spring, because the moment of dissolution has come and I am afflicted thereby. It is fitting that I should make lamentation, for since my heart is already with God, how should death come to me now ?"

One of his friends said to him then : " Since your heart is with God, if you die, yours will be a good death." The Şūfī replied : " Can Death take possession of him whose heart is united with God ? My heart is joined to Him, so it seems impossible to me that I should die."

If once you know the joy of this secret union with God, you cannot be contained by this world. He whose heart rejoices in the knowledge that he is really one with God loses his own individuality and becomes free. Be eternally satisfied with thy Beloved, and so shalt thou dwell in Him as the rose within its calyx.

### THE VALLEY OF GNOSIS

The Valley of Gnosis has neither beginning nor end. No other road is like the road which is trodden therein, nor any road there like any other road there, but the traveller in the body is other than the traveller in the spirit. Soul and body are for ever in a state of deficiency or perfection according to their strength and weakness. Therefore, of necessity, the road is revealed to each one according to his capacity for that revelation. On this road, trodden by Abraham, the Friend of God, how could the feeble spider be a companion to the elephant ? The progress of each will be in accordance with his spiritual state. Though the gnat were to fly with all its might,



could it ever equal the perfection of the wind? Since, then, there are different ways of making the journey, no two birds will fly alike. Each finds a way of his own, on this road of mystic knowledge, one by means of the Mihrāb,<sup>1</sup> and another through the idol. When the Sun of Gnosis shines forth from the heaven above, on to this most blessed road, each one is enlightened according to his capacity, and finds his own place, in the knowledge of the Truth.

When that Sun shines upon him, the dust-bin of this world is changed for him into a rose-garden: the kernel is seen beneath the rind. No longer does the lover see any particle of himself, he sees only the Beloved: wheresoever he looks, he sees always His Face: in every atom he beholds His dwelling-place. A hundred thousand mysteries are revealed to him from under the veil, as clearly as the sun, yet thousands of men are lost eternally, for one who perfectly apprehends these mysteries. He must be perfect, who would succeed in this quest, who would plunge into this fathomless sea. If the joy of its secrets be revealed to him, every moment will renew his longing for it. He thirsts to have a perfect apprehension of this place, he would sacrifice his life a hundred thousand times for the sake of this abode.

<sup>1</sup> The niche in a mosque showing the direction of Mecca, towards which the Muslim worshipper turns in prayer.

Even if thou shouldst attain to the Throne of Glory, cease not each moment to say : " Is there more than this ? " <sup>1</sup> Plunge thyself into the Sea of Gnosis, or if thou canst not, sprinkle the dust of the road upon thy head. O thou who remainest asleep—and it is no matter for congratulation—why dost thou not put on mourning ? If thou hast not attained to the joy of union with the Friend, at least arise, and put on signs of mourning for thy separation from Him. If thou hast not looked upon the Beauty of the Beloved, rouse thee, sit not still, but seek out those mysteries destined for thee, and if as yet thou knowest them not, seek them out in shame. How long wilt remain like an ass without a bridle ?

### THE STORY OF THE PHŒNIX

The Phœnix is a wonderful bird, which is found in Hindustān. It has no mate, but dwells alone in solitude. Its beak is wonderfully hard and long, like a flute, containing holes to the number of nearly a hundred. Each of these holes gives forth a different tone, and each tone reveals a different mystery. The art of music was taught to this bird by a philosopher who became its friend, and when the Phœnix utters these sounds, bird and fish are agitated thereby : all the wild

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Sāra*, 50 : 29;

## 52 THE PERSIAN MYSTICS: 'ATTĀR

beasts are reduced to silence, and by that entrancing music are bereft of their senses.

The Phoenix lives about a thousand years ; it knows quite clearly the time of its death, and when this knowledge is tearing at its heart, it gathers fuel, a hundred trees or more, and heaps them up in one place. It hastens to place itself in the midst of this pyre, and utters a hundred laments over itself. Then through each of those holes in its beak, out of the depths of its spotless soul, it gives forth plaintive cries of woe, and as it utters its dying lament, it trembles like a leaf. At the sound of its music, all the birds of the air gather together, and the wild beasts come, attracted by the sound, and all assemble to be present at the death of the Phoenix, knowing that they must die like it. When the moment has come to draw its last breath, the Phoenix spreads out its tail and its feathers, and thereby fire is kindled, and the flames spread swiftly to the heaped-up wood, and it blazes up with vigour. Soon both pyre and bird become a glowing red-hot mass. When the glowing charcoal is reduced to ashes, and but one spark remains, then, from the ashes, a new Phoenix arises into life.

### STORY OF THE MOTHS AND THE CANDLE

One night, the moths gathered together, tormented by the desire to unite themselves with the

candle. All of them said : " We must find one who can give us some news of that for which we seek so earnestly."

One of the moths went to a castle afar off, and saw within the light of a candle. He came back and told the others what he had seen, and began to describe the candle as intelligently as he was able to do. But the wise moth, who was chief of their assembly, observed : " He has no real information to give us of the candle."

Another moth visited the candle ; he passed close to the light and drew near to it. With his wings, he touched the flames of that which he desired : the heat of the candle drove him back, and he was vanquished. He also returned, and revealed something of the mystery, in explaining a little of what union with the candle meant, but the wise moth said to him : " Thine explanation is of no more real worth than that of thy comrade."

A third moth rose up, intoxicated with love, to hurl himself violently into the flame of the candle. He threw himself forward and stretched out his antennæ towards the flame. As he entered completely into its embrace, his members became red like the flame itself. When the wise moth saw from afar that the candle had identified the moth with itself, and had given to it its own light, he said : " This moth has accomplished his desire ; but he alone comprehends that to which he has attained. None other knows it, and that is all."

In truth, it is he who lost all knowledge and all trace of his own existence who has at the same time found knowledge of the Beloved. So long as you will not ignore your own body and soul, how will you ever know the Object of your love? He who has given you some indication thereof, by that means plunges your soul deep in torment, but since not even the breath of life is admitted here, none can attain to this and live.

### THE LOVERS OF GOD

One day, while Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī<sup>1</sup> was travelling in the desert, he came across the dead bodies of some dervishes, and he exclaimed, "O Lord, why have these who were so happy been thus overthrown?" And a heavenly Voice answered him, saying, "I knew of all this. I have bought them and paid the price of their blood." Dhū al-Nūn said, "O Lord, why didst Thou make them to die thus wretchedly?" And the Lord answered him, "So that their bloodwit might remain in My treasury. I slew them for Mine own consolation. When the earthly body of one of these My lovers is destroyed, then I reveal unto him the Sun of My Countenance, and I envelop him with My Beauty as with a garment, and I make radiant his countenance, because of his sacrifice. I make him to rest in contempla-

<sup>1</sup> One of the early Ṣūfī mystics and ascetics.

tion, on the dust of the Way, and cause him to be as a shadow on My road.

"Then I make the Light of My Countenance to shine upon him, and when that Sun appears, how can the shadow remain? It vanishes altogether in the Sun. Whoso loses himself, finds himself. Therefore lose thyself and say naught of thy loss: surrender thy soul, and seek naught from others. I know of no greater happiness for a man than this, that he lose himself."

### THE VALLEY OF POVERTY AND ANNIHILATION

The last valley to be traversed is the Valley of Poverty and Annihilation, but how can it be described in words? The essence of this Valley is forgetfulness, dumbness, deafness, and stupefaction. Here a hundred thousand shadows which formerly surrounded you are seen to disappear in a single ray of the Sun. When the Ocean of Infinity begins to stir its waves, how can the reflections upon its surface remain where they are? The world present and the world to come are but as pictures reflected on its waters, and he who declares that neither of these exist has gained much thereby. He whose heart is lost in that Ocean is lost therein for ever, and is eternally at rest. The heart, in this sea, is filled with tranquillity, for it finds there naught but

oblivion. If it is ever granted to a man to return from this oblivion, the whole creation will become clear to him and many mysteries will be revealed to him. Even those who were experienced travellers in the mystic Way, and men worthy to be called brave men, when they entered into the sphere of suffering, were lost at the first step therein, and what was the use of venturing farther, since none was able to take a second step forward ? Seeing that all went astray at the first step, you might think they were but senseless clods, though in truth they were men.

Aloes and common fire-wood, when they are put on the fire, are both of them equally reduced to ashes. These, though in two forms, are in effect the same substance, though their qualities are very different. If an unclean thing fall into a sea of rose-water, it will remain vile as it was, but if a pure thing fall into that Ocean, it will no longer manifest its own individual existence. Its movements will be merged in the movements of the Ocean ; ceasing to exist in itself, its beauty will remain. It will cease to exist and yet be existent. How can this be ? This is a mystery which is beyond the power of the mind to apprehend.

### THE CUP OF SELF-ANNIHILATION

Whoever leaves this world behind him passes away from mortality, and when he has passed

away from mortality, he attains to immortality. If thou findest thyself bewildered, O heart, pass over the bridge of *Şirāt*<sup>1</sup> and the burning fires of Hell. Grieve not, for the flame from the oil in the lamp gives forth smoke black as an old crow, but when the oil has been consumed by that flame, it has ceased to exist as oil. If thou dost desire to reach this abode of immortality, and to attain to this exalted station, divest thyself first of self, then summon unto thyself a winged steed out of nothingness, to bear thee aloft. Clothe thyself with the garment of nothingness and drink the cup of self-annihilation. Cover thy breast with nothingness, and draw over thy head the robe of non-existence. Set thy foot in the stirrup of complete renunciation and, looking straight before thee, ride the steed of not-being to the place where nothing is. Thou wilt be lost again and again, yet go on thy way in tranquillity, until at last thou shalt reach the world where thou art lost altogether to Self.

### THE PALACE OF THE KING

O thou who dost wander wilfully away from the true Path, know that he who desires the palace of this King, which is more desirable than any palace here, has but to draw near unto it. It is

<sup>1</sup> The bridge across Hell, which is thinner than a hair, and sharper than the edge of a knife.



the habitation of the soul, which abides unto eternity, it is the goal of our desires, the resting-place of the heart, the seat of Truth itself. The Presence of God Most High is as a mighty Ocean, and the Gardens of Paradise, with all their joys, are but as the least drop in it. He who possesses the Ocean possesses the drop also. All that is not the Ocean is mere vanity. Since thou art able to find the way to the Ocean itself, why dost hasten to seek a single drop of dew? Can he who shares in the secrets of the Sun dally with a mote in its beams? When a man has become one with the Whole, what concern has he with the part? What need has he who has found his soul of the members of his body? If thou, O man, hast found thy reality to be one with the Whole, then contemplate the Whole, seek out the Whole, become one with the Whole, and choose for thyself the Whole."

### THE HANDSOME KING

There was once a king so goodly to look upon that he had no equal in the realm of Beauty. The whole world was full of his fame, and every creature was smitten with desire for him. Sometimes he used to go forth, with his countenance veiled, lest men should see his beauty and perish, for thousands died out of love to him. Such is Love, and its effect. Each one, who sought

to see his beauty unveiled, willingly gave up his life therefor: to die for the love of that heart-ravishing countenance was better than to live a hundred lives apart from him. None could endure to be without him for a moment, and none was able to remain in his company: men were dying continually because of their desire for him. Strange it was that none could either bear his presence, or do without him. To anyone who had the power to behold him for a moment, the king displayed his face unveiled, while those who were unable to bear the sight of him, contented themselves with the joy of hearing his voice. Since not one was worthy of him, all died broken-hearted for the love of him.

The king therefore caused a mirror to be made, so that he could be regarded in this mirror. The palace of the king was suitably adorned, and the mirror was set in its place. The king went to the top of the palace and looked into the mirror, so that his face was reflected in the mirror, and by this means everyone was enabled to look upon that countenance of wondrous beauty.

So also, if thou dost cherish the beauty of the Beloved, know that thine heart is the mirror in which thou dost behold Him. Take thine heart in thine hand, and behold His Beauty there; make a mirror of thy soul, and contemplate His glory therein. He is thy King in the palace of Majesty, a palace made radiant by the sun of that

Divine Loveliness. Contemplate thy King within  
thine own heart : behold His Throne within  
a mere atom.

### THE FINDING OF THE SĪMURGH

Through trouble and shame the souls of these  
birds were reduced to utter Annihilation,  
while their bodies became dust.

Being thus utterly purified of all, they received  
Life from the Light of the Divine Presence.

Once again they became servants with souls  
renewed ; once again in another way were  
they overwhelmed with astonishment.

Their ancient deeds and undeeds were cleansed  
away and annihilated from their bosoms.

The Sun of Propinquity shone forth from them :  
the souls of all of them were illuminated by  
its rays.

Through the reflection of the faces of these thirty  
birds (*sī murgh*) of the world, they then  
beheld the countenance of the Sīmurgh ;

When they looked, that was the Sīmurgh : with-  
out doubt that Sīmurgh was those thirty  
birds.

All were bewildered with amazement, not knowing  
whether they were this or that.

They perceived themselves to be naught else but  
the Sīmurgh, while the Sīmurgh was naught  
else than the thirty birds.

When they looked towards the Simurgh, it was indeed the Simurgh which was there ;

While, when they looked towards themselves, they were thirty birds, and that was the Simurgh ; And if they looked at both together, both were the Simurgh, neither more nor less.

This one was that, and that one this : the like of this hath no one heard in the world.

All of them were plunged in amazement, and continued thinking without thought.

Since they understood naught of any matter, without speech they made inquiry of that Presence.

They besought the disclosure of this deep mystery, and demanded the solution of " we-ness " and " thou-ness."

## THE DISCOURSE OF THE SIMURGH

The Simurgh said to the thirty birds who had attained to the goal of their Quest : " This Sun of My Majesty is a mirror, and each one who comes to look at himself therein sees there his own soul and body, his whole self. Since you came here as thirty birds, you find thirty birds in the mirror. If you had been forty or fifty birds, the veil would still have been drawn aside. Though you are greatly changed, you see yourselves as you were. How can the eye of a creature attain unto Me ? How can the eye of the ant perceive

the Pleiades? Have you ever seen an ant lifting an anvil, or a gnat seizing an elephant with its teeth?

All that you have known or seen was not that Reality, and what you have said and heard was not that either. All these valleys which you have traversed, all these brave deeds which each one of you has done, all came about through My agency, and thereby you were enabled to see the oasis of My Essence and My Attributes. It is well that you, who are only thirty birds, should remain bewildered, without heart or patience or soul. But as for Me, I am of more account than thirty birds. I am the very Essence of the Real Sîmurgh. Annihilate yourselves in Me and enter into the glory of eternal bliss. So shall you find yourselves again in Me.'

### FROM MORTALITY TO IMMORTALITY

When a hundred thousand ages beyond all time, before or after, had passed, then these mortal birds delivered themselves over joyfully to total annihilation, and when all these birds, who were beyond themselves, had returned unto themselves, they attained, after annihilation, to immortality. Even as these things cannot be seen by mortal eyes, so also their description is beyond all explanation and all definition by mortal tongue.

Whilst thou art in existence or non-existence, how canst thou set foot in this place ? but when thou art no more hindered by existence or non-existence, then as in a dream, O ignorant one, thou seest what took place at the beginning and at the end, and when thou knowest the end, behold the gain of it ! A germ of life is nourished in the midst of a hundred honours and cares in order that it may become an intelligent and active being. That being learns the secrets that concern himself, he is given the knowledge of his own existence. Then Death comes to efface all, and casts down all this grandeur into humiliation. Man has turned again into the dust of the way, and has been annihilated again and again. But in the midst of this annihilation he has learnt a hundred different kinds of mysteries, of which he knew not hitherto. Then he has been given complete immortality, and he has received glory instead of humiliation.

Dost thou know what thou dost possess as thy heritage ? Enter then at last within thyself and meditate. So long as thy soul is not the bond-slave of the Eternal King, how wilt thou find acceptance here with Him ? So long as thou wilt not humiliate thyself in annihilation, thou wilt never know the state of immortality. First thou must be cast down in abasement in the Path which leads to God, then suddenly thou shalt be raised in honour. Cease to exist, so that thou

mayst become existent. So long as thou art existing, how canst thou attain to true existence ? Until thou art effaced in humility and self-annihilation thou canst never attain to the glory of immortality.

## SELECTIONS FROM "TADHKIRAT AL- AWLIYĀ "

### SAYINGS OF ḤASAN AL-BAṢRĪ

RESTRAIN these carnal souls of yours, for they seek ever to assert themselves, and mortify them, for if you give way to them, they will bring you into great affliction, and exhort them with the mention of God, for they are swift to become defiled.

The root of religion is abstinence, and that which corrupts abstinence is desire.

He is a wise man who regards this world as nothing, and so regarding it, seeks the other world, instead of disregarding the other world and seeking this. Whoso knows God regards Him as a friend, and whoso knows this world regards Him as an enemy.

He who is content, needing nothing, and who has sought solitude apart from mankind, will find peace ; he who has trodden his carnal desires underfoot will find freedom ; he who has rid himself of envy will find friendship ; and he who has patience for a little while will find himself prepared for Eternity.



Meditation is a mirror which reveals to you your virtues and your vices.

When the inhabitants of Paradise first open their eyes there, they remain in ecstasy for seven hundred thousand years, because the Lord Most High reveals Himself to them in all His Glory. When they look upon His Glory, they are overcome with awe, and when they look upon His Beauty, they are overwhelmed by the Unity.

#### IBRĀHĪM B. ADHAM, PRINCE OF BALKH

That Sultan of the world and of the Faith, that Šimurgh of the mountain of Truth, that treasure of the Eternal World, the spiritual leader of his age, such was Ibrāhīm b. Adham, Prince of Balkh.

Among his sayings were the following:

It is the mark of the gnostic that his thoughts consist chiefly in meditation and weeping, his speech consists chiefly of thanksgiving and praise to God, and his conduct consists of obedience to God, together with kind deeds and courageous living.

There are three veils which must be torn aside from the traveller's heart, so that he may attain to eternal felicity. First, if he were given complete possession of this world and the next, he should not rejoice in it, for avarice is a veil; second, if he were in enjoyment of the two worlds, and they were wrested from him, leaving him

in penury, he should not feel the least vexation, for passion is a veil ; third, though all men were to praise and flatter him, he should not be beguiled, for vanity is a veil, and the high-minded traveller must be free from all these.

Ibrāhīm asked someone if he desired to become one of the saints. The man said, "I do." "Then," said Ibrāhīm, "be not desirous of any particle of this world or the next. Turn thy face aside from all that exists and fix thy regard upon God. Eat what is lawful, and cease to occupy thyself with any save God alone."

#### RĀBĪ'A AL-'ADAWIYYA OF BAṢRA

That one set apart in the seclusion of sanctity, that woman veiled with the veil of religious sincerity, that one on fire with love and longing, that one enamoured of the desire to approach her Lord and be consumed in His glory, that woman who lost herself in union with the Divine, that one accepted by men as a second spotless Mary—Rābī'a al-'Adawiyya, may God have mercy on her ! If anyone should ask, "Why have you made mention of her in the class of men ?" I should reply, "God does not look upon the outward form ; for it is not the outward form that matters, but the inner purpose of the heart. Wherever these people, the Ṣūfīs, are, they have no separate existence, but exist only

in the Unity of God. In the Unity, what remains of the existence of 'I' or 'thou'? So how can 'man' or 'woman' continue to be?" When a woman walks in the Way of God like a man, she cannot be called a woman.

### RĀBĪ'A AND THE WILD CREATURES

One day Rābī'a had gone to the mountains and there a band of wild creatures gathered round her, deer and gazelle and mountain goats and wild asses, who came and looked at her and drew close to her. Suddenly Ḥasan al-Baṣrī appeared, and seeing Rābī'a, he approached her, and those wild creatures, when they saw Ḥasan, all fled away forthwith, and Rābī'a was left alone. Ḥasan was vexed at this, and looking at Rābī'a, he asked, "Why did they flee in terror from me, when they were so friendly with you?" Rābī'a said, "What have you eaten to-day?" and he told her, "Some onions fried in fat." Then she said, "You eat of their fat, how should they not flee from you?"

### SAYINGS OF RĀBĪ'A

On one occasion Rābī'a fell ill, and her sickness was serious. Her friends came and asked her what was the cause of her illness, and she replied, "I looked towards Paradise, and my Lord has

chastened me. At daybreak I longed for the joys of Paradise, and my Friend has rebuked me. This illness is a reproach from Him."

Once Rābi'a saw a man who had a bandage bound about his head. She said to him, "Why is this bandage round your head?" He said, "My head is paining me." Rābi'a asked him what age he was, and when he answered that he was thirty years old, she asked him further, "Were you in pain and trouble for the greater part of your life?" "No," he replied. Then Rābi'a said: "For thirty years God has kept your body fit and well, and you have never bound upon it the bandage of gratitude, but because of a single night of pain in your head, you bind it with the bandage of complaint."

Someone said to Rābi'a, "What is Love?" and she answered: "Love has come from Eternity and passes into Eternity, and none has been found in seventy-thousand worlds who has been able to drink one drop of it until at last he is absorbed in God, and thence comes the saying, 'He loves His saints and they love Him.'"

## RĀBI'A AND HER LORD

After her death, Rābi'a was seen in a dream by one of her friends, who said to her, "Tell us of your state, and how you escaped from Munkar

and Nakīr.”<sup>1</sup> Rābi‘a answered, “Those angelic beings came and said, ‘Who is thy Lord?’ and I said to them, ‘Return and tell your Lord, “Notwithstanding the thousands upon thousands of Thy creatures, Thou hast not forgotten a poor old woman. I, who had only Thee in all the world, have never forgotten Thee, that Thou shouldst ask, ‘Who is Thy Lord?’”’”

### SHAQĪQ BALKHĪ

That most holy man, who put his whole trust in God, he who possessed all the secrets of the Truth, that one revered as a Pillar of the Faith, that great exemplar of religion, that unwearied explorer in the way of God, Abū ‘Alī Shāqīq Balkhī, may God have mercy on him! He was without any equal among his contemporaries and was the spiritual leader of his age. Spending his life in asceticism and works of devotion, and depending, throughout his life, upon God to support his needs, he excelled in all kinds of knowledge, and wrote many books on various subjects. His knowledge of the Road to God he had derived from Ibrāhīm b. Adham, and he had also consorted with many others of the great Ṣūfis; he even asserted that he had been the humble disciple of seventeen hundred masters. The books he had acquired, he said, would have made loads for several camels.

<sup>1</sup> The two angels who visit Muslims after death, in the tomb, to question them on their faith.

In answer to an inquirer he said : " He who walks in the Way of God is distinguished by four things. Firstly, by his freedom from all anxiety for his daily sustenance. Secondly, all that he does is done in sincerity and with a pure heart. Thirdly, he is in a state of continual enmity with Satan. Fourthly, he is prepared for Death, whensoever it may come."

### SHAQĪQ AND THE SLAVE

It is related that once when there was a great famine at Balkh, so much so that men were eating one another, Shaqīq Balkhī saw a slave in the bazaar who displayed great cheerfulness and was laughing for joy, and Shaqīq said to him in astonishment, " O slave, this gaiety is misplaced ; do you not see that the people all around you are stricken unto starvation ? " The slave replied : " What have I to fear ? for I belong to a master possessed of unusual foresight, and he has such a store of grain that hunger will never touch me."

Shaqīq was overcome for a moment ; then he said : " O my God, because his earthly master has ample stores of food, this slave is full of joy. Thou art the Ruler and the Lord of all things, Who dost give to each one of us our daily bread ; why, then, should we be anxious ? "

Forthwith Shaqīq Balkhī turned aside from the affairs of this world and, repenting of his

former manner of life, he set his face towards the Way of God, and attained to a state of complete hope and trust in Him. He used to say, "I am in truth the disciple of this slave."

### PROVISIONS FOR THE WAY

There is a story told of how a certain man came to Shaqīq Balkhī and said to him : "I am about to start for the Pilgrimage." "What are your provisions for the journey?" Shaqīq asked, to which the man replied, "I have four kinds of provision." Shaqīq asked what they were. The pilgrim said : "First, there is my daily sustenance from God, and I know no one more sure of it than I am. Second, I do not feel that the share He gives to others in any way takes from my own. Third, I know that the hand of God will find me wherever I may go. Fourth, I am confident that whatever may befall me, my Lord knows more of my state and what is good for me than I do."

Shaqīq said : "You have done well, these are good provisions for the Way. May good fortune attend you !"

### SAYINGS OF SHAQĪQ BALKHĪ

One day, someone said to Shaqīq Balkhī : "O Shaqīq, you are blamed because it is said that Shaqīq lives on the work of other men. Come,

work for me and I will give you wages for your work." "I would be willing to serve you," Shaqīq replied, "if it were not for five disadvantages in your service. Your wealth is liable to diminish; thieves may carry off your goods; all that you give me you will grudge; if you find any fault in me, you will probably stop my pay; and if death should overtake you, I should remain without resources. But I have a Master, in Whom is no defect, and Whose service is free from all imperfection. His treasures will never diminish and thieves cannot take possession of His goods. He gives the means of subsistence to the whole world and does not grudge His gifts. If He were to discover a thousand faults in me, He would not diminish my daily bread. I have the certain hope that He will never leave me without resources and that, in His mercy, He will blot out my transgressions."

#### ABŪ AL-FAYḌ DHŪ AL-NŪN AL-MIṢRĪ

It is related that one day Dhū al-Nūn's friends came in to see him and noticed that he was weeping, and when they asked the cause, he said: "Last night, while I was engaged in worship, I fell asleep, and I saw in a dream God Almighty, and He said to me: 'O Abū al-Fayḍ, when I created men, I divided them into ten sections and I showed the world to them; nine sections out



of the ten turned towards it and one section remained unmoved. I divided those who remained into ten more sections, and showed them Paradise; nine of the sections turned in its direction, and one section alone remained. Again I divided those who had remained unmoved into ten sections, and displayed Hell before their eyes; all were terrified and filled with fear of Hell, save one section, which alone remained, of those who had not been beguiled by this world, who did not feel attracted by Paradise, and who had no fear of Hell.

“ ‘I said to them, “What do ye desire?” They said, “Thou, O Lord, knowest what we desire.” For they desired their Lord and Him alone.’ ”

### DHŪ AL-NŪN AND THE KING'S SON

It is said that Dhū al-Nūn related concerning himself: “Once I was seated in the mosque, and was saying: ‘How foolish is that one who, being weak, goes to law with one stronger than himself.’

“The king's son happened to overhear these words, and, entering with his suite, said to me, ‘What do you mean by that?’ I said to him, ‘Man is weak and the Lord Most High is strong: it is an act of infidelity even to wish to plead at His court.’ The prince changed colour on hearing these words, and asked me: ‘Which,

then, is the road that leads to God ? ' I said to him, ' There is a little road, and a great road. If you choose the little road, you must renounce entirely sin and all fleshly desires ; if you choose the great road, you must cast out of your heart all that is not God Himself. '

" ' So be it, ' cried the prince, ' I choose the great road. ' Then forthwith, he donned the woollen robe of the Şūfīs, and casting out of his heart the love of this present world, he became a dervish. "

### SAYINGS OF DHŪ AL-NŪN

Yusuf b. Ḥusayn asked Dhū al-Nūn, " With whom shall I seek to have companionship ? " " With that One, " he answered, " Who will bring into your intercourse neither ' thou ' nor ' I. ' " Then Yusuf b. Ḥusayn said, " Give me a word of counsel. " " Be the friend of God Most High, " said Dhū al-Nūn, " and the enemy of your own passions, for they are hostile to Him ; and consider no one beneath you, even though he be an idolater, for it may be that gnosis will be taken from you and given to him. When God grants you any favour, accept it with all gratitude. "

Dhū al-Nūn said : " The gnostic becomes more humble every hour, for every hour he is drawing nearer to his Lord. "

" In one of my journeys, " he said, " I saw a woman and I asked her concerning the end of

Love, and she said, "O Fool, Love hath no end." I said to her, "Why?" and she answered, "Because the Beloved hath no end."

Knowledge is of three sorts. First, the knowledge of the Unity of God, and this is common to all believers; second, knowledge gained by proof and demonstration, and this belongs to the wise and the eloquent and the learned; and third, the knowledge of the attributes of the Unity, and this belongs to the Saints, those who contemplate the Face of God within their hearts, so that God reveals Himself to them in a way in which He is not revealed to any others in the world.

#### SAYINGS OF ḤĀRITH AL-MUḤĀSIBĪ

To practise patience means to know how to serve as a target for the arrows of adversity.

True resignation means to hold out the neck to the sovereign decrees of God, and to remain unmoved both outwardly and inwardly when misfortunes come.

He who purifies his inward self by contemplation and sincerity will find that God will adorn his outward conduct with all godly and righteous acts.

Whoever enjoys the company of the dervishes, those humble-minded and God-seeking men, will find therein all the delights experienced by the inhabitants of Paradise.

Love is the inclination towards an object, to the exclusion of all else, then the preference of that to oneself, in body, soul, and possessions, and complete agreement with it both outwardly and inwardly, and the knowledge that all short-coming lies in oneself.

The gnostics are those who cross the ditch of satisfaction and plunge into the sea of purity and bring out the pearls of fulfilment, so that they may of a surety attain to the secret and inmost Being of God.

#### A PRAYER OF YAḤYĀ MU'ADH RĀZĪ

My God, of Thy mercy forgive my sins. O my Lord, though my sinful deeds make me fear Thy justice, yet the greatness of Thy compassion makes me hope in Thee. O Lord, I have not merited Paradise by my deeds, and I cannot endure the pains of Hell, so I entrust myself simply to Thy grace. If, on the Day of Resurrection, I am asked, "What hast thou brought unto Me?" I shall reply: "What can one straight from prison, with unkempt hair, and tattered garment, burdened with worldly cares and full of shame, bring unto Thee? Wash me from my sins, give unto me the robe of the redeemed, and in Thy mercy cast me not away from Thy Presence."

ABŪ YAZĪD BISTĀMĪ ON THE UNITIVE  
LIFE

I went from God to God, until they cried from me in me, saying, "O thou I!" for I have reached annihilation in God.

For thirty years God Most High was my mirror, now I am my own mirror, and that which I was I am no more, for "I" and "God" represents polytheism, a denial of His Unity. Since I am no more, God Most High is His own mirror. Behold, now I say that God is the mirror of myself, for with my tongue He speaks and I have passed away.

## HAKĪM TIRMIDHĪ AND HIS MOTHER

It happened that Tirmidhī, when a boy, had made his plans to go with two fellow-students and travel to other places in order to secure instruction. When his mother heard of this plan, she was very sad and said to him: "What, my son, you wish to go away, though I am in poor health and have no one but you to support me! How can you go away and leave me alone and infirm?" Those words went to his heart and he abandoned the idea of his journey, and his two friends went off without him, in search of knowledge.

One day, when he was seated in the cemetery, and was lamenting, "Here am I neglected,

remaining ignorant, while my companions will return with all the knowledge they have acquired," suddenly an old man appeared before him and said, "O my son, why dost thou lament thus?" When Tirmidhī had set forth his case, the old man said to him, "If you so desire it, I will teach you each day and you will speedily outstrip those who have gone away." Tirmidhī said joyfully, "I do desire it," and each day from that time the old man gave him lessons and continued to teach him thus for three years.

"At the end of these three years," said Tirmidhī, "I realised that he was the Prophet Khidr, upon him be peace,<sup>1</sup> and it was thanks to my Mother that I had obtained so great a boon."

### JUNAYD OF BAGHDAD

It is related that a Sayyid named Nāṣirī, going from Gilān on pilgrimage to the Ka'ba, when he arrived in Baghdad, went at once to visit Junayd. The latter greeted him on his arrival and said to him, "O Sayyid, whence art thou?" He replied, "From Gilān." Junayd then asked him to what family he belonged. He said that he was one of the descendants of 'Alī, the Commander of the Faithful, and son-in-law of the Prophet. Then Junayd said to him, "Thine ancestor 'Alī

<sup>1</sup> A prophet and a saint, who presided over the well of Immortality, and who was regarded by the Ṣūfis as the greatest of all spiritual directors.

struck with two swords, with one he smote the infidels, with the other he smote his own passions. Of which of these two swords dost thou intend to make use ? ”

When the Sayyid heard these words, he wept bitterly, and fell at Junayd's feet, saying, “ O Shaykh, I have come on pilgrimage to this place, but do thou show me the Way to God.” “ It is thine own heart,” said Junayd, “ which is in truth the dwelling-place of God Most High. So far as in thee lies, give no admission into this abode of His, to any other save Him.”

### ABŪ ḤUSAYN NŪRĪ

Abū Ḥusayn was called Nūrī, because when he was speaking with God in the midst of the darkness of the light, a light (*nūr*) issued forth from his mouth, so that the whole house was illuminated thereby. Others said that he was called Nūrī, because by the light of intuition he was enabled to interpret the mysteries of the Invisible. It was also related of him that he had a cell in the desert, and there every night, while he was engaged in worship, people watching that spot used to see a light which shone forth from his cell and streamed up to the heavens.

### NŪRĪ AND THE TWO SLAVES

It is related that once the slave-market at Baghdad caught fire and many people lost their

lives in the flames. In a certain shop there were two Greek slave-boys of great beauty, and they were surrounded by the flames and could not escape. Their master proclaimed that he would give a thousand pieces of gold to anyone who would bring them out to safety, but no one had the courage to rescue them. Suddenly Nūrī arrived on the spot, and saw the two slave-boys, who were crying out in their distress. Saying, "In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful," he entered the burning building and brought the two boys out in safety.

The owner of the slaves brought the thousand pieces of gold, and offered them to Nūrī, but the latter said: "Take them away and give thanks to God, for He would not have granted me such a degree of His favour as I enjoy, if I had taken gifts such as these, in exchange for the next world."

## NŪRĪ AND JUNAYD

One day, when Nūrī had fallen ill, Junayd came to inquire for him and brought him some roses and fruit. Shortly afterwards, Junayd himself fell ill, and Nūrī came to inquire after him, in the company of his disciples, to whom he said: "Let each one of you take upon himself a part of Junayd's sickness, so that he may be restored to health." "We will do so willingly," they said,



and immediately Junayd rose up, fit and well. Then Nūrī said to him: "That was what you should have done when you came to inquire after me, instead of bringing such things as flowers and fruit."

### ABŪ 'UTHMĀN ḤIRĪ AND THE ASS

It is related that one day Ḥirī was going to school, accompanied by four slaves, of whom one was an Abyssinian, one a Greek, one a Kashmīrī, and one a Turk. Ḥirī was carrying a golden pen-case in his hand, he had a fine muslin turban on his head, and was wearing a robe of silk. He came to the old caravanserai, and on looking in, saw an ass with a wounded shoulder; a carrion crow was pecking at the wound, and the ass had not the strength to drive it away. Abū 'Uthmān was filled with pity, and said to one of his slaves, "Why are you with me?" The slave replied, "So that I may help you to carry out any idea that may pass through your mind."

Ḥirī at once took off his silken robe and covered the ass with it, and bound it upon him with his muslin turban. Immediately that ass seemed to pray to God for him in its own language. As a fact, it was from this day that the degree of spiritual power accorded to the elect of God was manifested in Abū 'Uthmān.

## KHAYR NASSĀJ (THE WEAVER)

When Khayr Nassāj was making the pilgrimage to Mecca, his journey took him by way of Kūfa, and when he arrived at the gate of that city, he was wearing a patched and tattered garment, and as he was of a swarthy countenance and looked like a slave, the people made a mock of him. A certain man who saw him said to himself, "I will make him work for me for a while." So he went up to him and said: "Are you not a slave?" The other replied, "In truth I am a slave." The man said, "Have you not run away from your master?" He answered, "I have done so." Then the man said to him, "I shall take charge of you in order to hand you over to your master," to which he replied, "I myself am seeking this; for a long time I have been desirous of finding someone who would restore me to my master."

Thereupon the man carried him off to his house and gave him the name of Khayr. Khayr went willingly and served the man, who taught him the art of weaving. For several years Khayr served his master, until the time came when that man was ashamed, when he observed Khayr's sincerity in all he did, and his courtesy and intelligence, and witnessed his unfailing piety. So his master said to him, "I did wrong; you were not my slave. Go now whithersoever it

pleases you." Then Khayr departed to Mecca, and afterwards attained to such a degree in the spiritual life that Junayd used to say: "Khayr is the best among us."

It is related that part of his time Khayr spent in weaving, and part of it sitting on the bank of the river Tigris, and the fishes used to leap around him and act as his messengers. One day he had been weaving some fine material for an old woman, and she said to him, "If I bring thee the money for it, and I do not find thee here, to whom shall I give it?" He said, "Throw it into the Tigris." When she came, he was not there, so she threw the money into the river, and when Khayr returned to the bank of the river, the fish came up out of the water and laid the money before him.

## SELECTIONS FROM THE "PANDNĀMA"

### THE STRUGGLE WITH THE LOWER SOUL

THE truly wise man is he who is grateful for the gifts of God, and who knows at the same time how to rule his own soul. Whoever knows how to control his passions will be among those who have secured freedom in this world. Although Poverty is hard to endure, yet there is nothing better worth having. The man who reduces his rebellious soul to obedience will earn a good name for himself among the wise. Take heed and discipline your lower soul, lest it bring you into dire misfortune. He who seeks for salvation in truth must turn his face away from all created things. Know that all mankind are sunk in sleep : he alone is truly awake who has departed from this world.

### OF HUMILITY AND THE SOCIETY OF THE DERVISHES

If you are possessed of discernment joined with knowledge, seek the company of the dervishes and become one of them. Associate with none

but them. Love for the dervishes is the key which opens the door into Paradise, and those who hate them are worthy of anathema. The dervish's garment is naught but a patched robe, and he is not led astray by creaturely desires and passions. Until a man treads his carnal self underfoot, how can he find the way to the abode of God Most High? The man who walks in the Path of God has no longing after fine palaces and fair gardens: in his heart is naught but the pain of yearning love.

Though you raise your palace as high as the heavens, yet in the end you will come to be buried under the earth, and though your strength and power were like to those of Rustam, yet at the last you will die, like Bahrām, and be brought down to the tomb. Be not unmindful of Eternity, and set not your heart upon the transient goods of this world. Be patient in the midst of the tribulations of this life, and when things go well with you, give thanks to God Almighty.

### OF GODLY POVERTY

Do you know what Poverty really is? If you have no knowledge of it, I will teach you concerning it. A faqīr, although he possesses no treasure save the patched robe which he wears, conducts himself before men as if he had abundance. Though he be hungry, he boasts of satiety: for

his enemies he has nothing but friendship. He appears to be lean, wretched, and infirm, yet, in the matter of religious devotion, he is no whit behind the most robust and vigorous. Since his heart is full, though his hand be empty, he is able to weigh down the scales.

Abandon yourself, then, to become one of the poor, so that the Almighty may take you under His care. He who is found in the company of those who are poor for the sake of God will be admitted into the palace of Eternity.

## RENUNCIATION AND SOLITUDE

If you seek to attain purity of heart, you must detach yourself from all things : if you are wise, become one of those who act like the wise and join yourself to their company.

Renunciation means detachment from all claims, and by that you will understand the true meaning of solitude. The first step in renunciation is to say farewell to the sensual desires ; nay, more, it means breaking loose from all your passions, and then you will attain to the extreme degree of solitude. If you renounce all hope of created things, then you will have all that is to be gained by complete self-stripping. When God becomes your sole support, then your soul will attain to perfect isolation.

Abandon this world for the sake of Eternity :

strip yourself of the garments of wealth, and if you achieve this degree of happiness, you will have found true renunciation. If, for the love of God, you renounce even the bliss of the next world, men will find in you the pattern of one who is detached from all ties. Go, strip yourself of all things, go apart into solitude, bring yourself down to the dust, and so shall you be exalted to the heights. Put away from you pride, self-love, and attachment to your own opinion : learn to know yourself, and do not concern yourself with others. He who walks around the brazier of burning charcoal has his garments blackened and soiled by the smoke, but he who approaches the seller of perfumes ('Aṭṭār), himself acquires a part of the sweet fragrance given forth by those scents.

### OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Strive to acquire the mystic gnosis, so that you may learn to know God. He who truly knows God by contemplation realises that Eternal Life means passing away from the personal self. Without this knowledge, man has no real existence ; he is not worthy to approach God, nor will he obtain the goal of his desires. If you really know your self and its desires, you will know God Most High and His gifts.

He alone is the true gnostic who knows God,

and whoever is without this knowledge is unfit to be counted among human beings. The gnostic has a heart full of sincere and constant love : all his actions are pure and without stain. The one to whom this gift of Gnosis has been given finds no place in his heart save for God alone.

To the gnostic, this world is of no concern, nay more, he never gives a thought to himself. Gnosis means that the gnostic passes away from himself into God. How can the one who does not completely pass away from self attain to this perfection ? The gnostic occupies himself neither with this world nor the next ; he is not concerned with any but his Lord. Because he has died altogether to himself, he is completely absorbed in the attainment of union with God.



## SELECTIONS FROM THE "JAWHAR AL-DHĀT"

### THE OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD

THOU art Fire, but Thy fire is veiled, for in all to which Thou hast joined Thyself, Thou art under a veil. Thou art the Breath of Life in both body and soul. Thou art the Water of Life to be found in every place. In every form Thou dost manifest Thyself, according to Thy Will ; even in the dust are Thy mysteries shown forth. Thou art the mine and dost show Thyself forth in its jewels. Thou, the Creator, art seen in the creatures, Spirit shining through gross matter.

Thou art God in Absolute Unity, and Thou dwellest here in body and soul, for Thou art the Divine Essence dwelling in the midst of each one of us. O Lord Most High, how glorious is the manifestation of Thy Light ! Thou art the Sought and the Seeker ; what remains to be said ? Give me, I pray Thee, to drink from the cup of Immortality. For Thou art the Cup and the Wine and the Cup-bearer.

Since I am myself part of the Mystery of the

Unity, happy will be that moment when soul shall be free from body and return unto its Home.

## THE UNIVERSE SEEKING ITS SOURCE

God is the Light of both body and soul, and it is He Who hath hidden the soul within the body, and He Who hath created both earth and heaven from His Light. He hath made the vault of heaven His pavilion in the firmament beyond Infinity. Moon and sun are His worshippers, making supplication before Him. Human reason is bewildered before Him, for it can teach naught concerning His Essence, but all things, didst thou but know it, can give thee sight of the Friend.

The heaven itself revolves in silence, consumed by its yearning to look upon Him. The sun, as it goes on its orbit, is seeking to solve the mystery ; the moon and the stars, as they wax and wane, are craving for union with Him. When the flames of the fire rise heavenwards, it is from their longing to meet with Him. The wind, without foot or pinion, mounts aloft in its search for Him. The water rushing by in every stream seeks to find its rest in Him. For His sake the mountain is cleft into range upon range, so that in every spot it may keep its watch for Him. Even the sea, when thou seest it raging so furiously, is seething with yearning for the Friend.

## THE SPIRIT OF MAN

Since the whole universe is thus seeking for its God, do thou also seek out the inner meaning of Reality. How long canst be content with the outward and the external? Thou hast the secret of Reality within thyself, thou dost possess the treasure of the Divine Essence and Its attributes, yet is thy heart far from the Essence Itself. Thou art endowed with a being above all in the universe, and thou must be thine own guide towards the Reality of the Essence. If only for a moment, raise thou the veil from the spirit, and when thou hast revealed it, veil thy beauty again, for the atoms of the universe are all watching.

In truth thou art the Centre and at the same time the Circumference. Thou art the attributes of all things in one. Thou art the Beloved and the Desired of souls. Thou art seeking for the Object of thy desire, and that which thou seekest is within thyself. Since thou hast no equal, O Spirit of man, how can I describe thee? The human intellect is but an infant when it seeks to describe thy perfection, it is helpless when it tries to portray thy beauty. But Love knows thine attributes, for Love itself is one with that which is thine Essence,

## LOVE AS THE RULER OF THE UNIVERSE

The whole world is a market-place for Love,  
 For naught that is, from Love remains remote.  
 The Eternal Wisdom made all things in Love :  
 On Love they all depend, to Love all turn.  
 The earth, the heavens, the sun, the moon, the  
     stars,  
 The Centre of their orbit find in Love.  
 By Love are all bewildered, stupefied,  
 Intoxicated by the Wine of Love.  
 From each a mystic silence Love demands.  
 What do all seek so earnestly ? 'Tis Love.  
 What do they whisper to each other ? Love.  
 Love is the subject of their inmost thoughts.  
 In Love no longer " thou " and " I " exist,  
 For Self has passed away in the Beloved.  
 Now will I draw aside the veil from Love,  
 And in the temple of mine inmost soul,  
 Behold the Friend, Incomparable Love.  
 He who would know the secret of both worlds,  
 Will find the secret of them both, is Love.

## THE SOUL

Thou hast a treasure within thy soul, a treasure  
 hidden there by the Friend, and within this  
 treasure of thine is the essence of all mysteries.  
 If thou desirest to see this treasure, why dost thou  
 remain a slave to thyself ? If thou dost desire

to seek for this treasure, thou wilt find no rest here. Within this treasure is contained the mystery of all Being, and now this treasure is hidden from sight. When God created man, then at that moment the treasure of the Divine Essence became manifested, for He showed Himself in our form.

### THE ASCENT OF THE SOUL

For thee there is an ascent of the soul towards the Divine Light, therefore shall thy heart and soul in the end attain to union with that Light. With thy whole heart and soul, seek to regain Reality, nay, seek for Reality within thine own heart, for Reality in truth is hidden within thee : the heart is the dwelling-place of that which is the Essence of the universe, within the heart and soul is the very Essence of God. Like the saints, make a journey into thy self ; like the lovers of God, cast one glance within. As a lover now, in contemplation of the Beloved, be unveiled within, and behold the Essence. Form is a veil to thee and thy heart is a veil. When the veil vanishes, thou shalt become all Light.

Tear aside the veils of all thou seest in this world, and thou wilt find thyself apart in solitude with God. If thou dost draw aside the veils of the stars and the spheres, thou wilt see all to be one with the Essence of thine own pure soul.

If thou wilt tear aside the veil, thou shalt become pure, as He is pure. Cast aside the veil from existence and non-existence and thou shalt see forthwith the true meaning of God's purpose. When thou hast cast aside the veil, thou wilt see the Essence, and all things will be shown forth within the Essence. If thou dost draw aside the veil from the Face of the Beloved, all that is hidden will be made manifest, and thou wilt become God, for then wilt thou be the very Essence of the Divine.

### MAN

Man, what thou art is hidden from thyself.  
 Knowest not that morning, mid-day, and the eve  
 All are within thee ? The ninth heaven art thou,  
 And from the spheres into this roar of time  
 Didst fall erewhile. Thou art the brush that  
     painted  
 The hues of all this world—the light of life,  
 That rayed its glory on the nothingness.

### LOVE

Love, in truth, it is that interprets Thy Unity,  
 at which Reason remains bewildered. Love it  
 is that proclaims Thy praise abroad, telling how  
 that which is transient is seen in the end to be  
 naught. It is Love which sees Thy Beauty, for

it beholds the secret depths of Thy Perfection. Love, in truth, draws aside the veil, for it saw Thee in Thy Oneness and knew Thee as Thou art. Love it is which holds the key to the soul, for Thou art its King in both this world and the next. In truth, since there is naught but Thee, there is none other existent, save Thine Essence. Since Thou art the Essence of what is manifested, in all things that are, is Thine Essence made manifest. Thou dost show forth in all things the mystery hidden therein, since Thou Thyself art Love in concealment. Thou dost show Thy Face within the veil of the soul, there dost Thou speak and there Thou art heard.

Verily Thou art the Absolute Light of this world and the next, and every soul doth seek for union with Thee.

#### WHEN SEPARATION COMES TO AN END

I have ceased to have a separate existence, for I have pierced beyond the veil, and the bird of Unity has there become my prey. I no longer exist apart, for I am become pure within heart and soul, made pure by Love. In the love of His glorious Majesty, I have found supreme joy. No longer are we separated, for my beauty has become resplendent in the Beauty Supreme. In very truth I am now one with the Prophets and the Saints. I have said all that can be said, for I have

looked upon God. What remains to be said, what further secret have I to reveal? What concern have I now with this world, since I have seen the Face of God, unveiled? What remains of temporality, since His universality exists? I see naught of myself, only the form of the Friend, for I have passed away in Love. In this place is Reality unveiled, for Reality appears in passing away from the self into God, and attaining to immortality in Him.

### THE TRIUMPH OF THE SOUL

Joy! joy! I triumph! now no more I know  
 Myself as simply me, I burn with love  
 Unto myself, and bury me in love.  
 The Centre is within me and its wonder  
 Lies as a circle everywhere about me.  
 Joy! joy! no mortal thought can fathom me.  
 I am the merchant and the pearl at once.  
 Lo, Time and Space lie crouching at my feet.  
 Joy! joy! when I would revel in a rapture,  
 I plunge into myself and all things know.



## SELECTIONS FROM OTHER WORKS THAN THE FOREGOING

### QAŞIDA IN PRAISE OF THE CREATOR

PRAISE be to the Creator, Whose attributes, ineffable and glorious, bring down the intellect even of the Prophets to the dust of impotence. Though all His creation were to meditate for a hundred thousand years upon the Nature and Majesty of God, yet at the last they could but confess that all had been in vain, saying, "O God, all we have come to know is that we know nothing." There, where the boundless ocean stirs its waves, how can the dew-drop hope to be perceived? There, where the ear of the heavens is rent by the thunder's peal, how can the fly, imprisoned in a jar, make its buzzing to be heard? Can the darkness endure beside the Light of the Divine Essence? Or the full moon appear upon the horizon, when the sun is at the zenith?

### GOD IN HIS WORLD

O Thou Who into this bazaar, hast come with  
veiled Face,

## SELECTIONS FROM OTHER WORKS 99

Hast drawn by Thine attraction all mankind to  
follow Thee.

One ray from Thy fair Countenance has lightened  
all our race,

The harvest of Thy sowing has borne fruit on  
every tree.

### GOD THE SOLE EXISTENCE

There is naught but Thee in the whole world.  
Everywhere in the Universe it is Thy Face that  
we see. In whatsoever direction I turn my eyes,  
there art Thou, and without Thee there is nothing  
that is.

O Thou Who art the Essence of all that abides,  
in what that subsists art Thou not ? Thou art  
in no place, and where is the place where Thou  
art not ? O Thou Whose Essence is independent  
of seeking and striving, he whose eye beholds,  
on the Way, Thy Beauty, he whose intellect  
beholds the image of Thy Perfection, though all  
the glories of the world were displayed before him  
to dazzle his eyes, yet would he see clearly in the  
Light which comes of Union with Thee.

### THE TRANSIENCE OF THIS WORLD

All things which for our profit now we see  
Will change, and sore affliction come to be,  
And when the time of dissolution comes,  
Our all will pass into non-entity.

## THE SPIRIT IN PRISON

O Nightingale of the Spirit, thou remainest afflicted, for thou art caught in the snare of this world, and therefore thou dost continue in sorrow. O Spirit, thou who art so excellent in understanding, so wonderful in knowledge, and in thy desire to know, surpassing all in thine endowments. Since thou hast come from that incomparable world, resplendent and unequalled in thy beauty, thou dost chafe under the veil of the material self, and wilt have no rest until thou dost come forth from beneath the veil.

O Spirit, how dost thou find thyself in this strange world, how dost thou endure thine attachment to the evil self? O pearl of purity, know that thy price is high, realise thine own worth: renounce all base desires, and seek once more the Court of Heaven.

## THE SEEKER AND THE SOUGHT

As a bird, from the World of Mystery,  
I flew to set some earth-bound creature free,  
But since I found none worthy of that Realm,  
Thence I returned, but took none back with me.

## GAIN IN LOSS

Lose thyself, die joyfully and sacrifice thy life,  
because thou art living now in the Life of Another.

## SELECTIONS FROM OTHER WORKS 101

Contemplate that One unceasingly with the eye of the heart, and journey away from self. If thou dost not desire to be dust under the dust, then must thou look away from the dust.

When the heart is distraught in seeking to approach unto its God, it is because the desire for union has taken possession of the soul, for all that exists must needs lay itself at His feet. When we ourselves have perceived the veil that Self lays upon us, we renounce Self altogether. Burning with love towards Thee, we bring our lamentations and our prayers; like the candle, we consume away in our desire, and renouncing all else, we offer ourselves unto Thee.

## LOVE AS THE GUIDE TO THE BELOVED

When Love becomes manifested in its perfection, in thine eyes will remain neither seer nor seen, and the heart will no longer contain itself; out of love to the Friend, for ever will it remain in rapture beyond itself. None who is faint-hearted will attain to that Love, for Love requires the strength of the full-grown, and Reason is but a child before it. The lover knows that in passing away in Love, he will find the perfection of Love. Learn to know Love in truth, and pass away from self, and even as thou passest away from mortality, thou shalt put on immortality.

Love, in truth, is a guide to the Friend; there

is but a hair's breadth between thee and the breast of the Beloved. Love will surely see the Way, for it will find its Lord within itself. All being is for Love an indication of the Way to the Beloved: therefore, if thou dost desire sure guidance, seek it from none but Love.

### THE ANNIHILATION OF THE SELF IN GOD

In the deep waters of the ocean of Annihilation I would seek to be, for though I aspire to the Sun, yet, since one is powerless to attain to Thy great height, I would desire to sleep at Thy feet. Behold, what grief I suffer without Thee! But now, since I have become naught, I know that in the end I shall attain again to my desire. I said unto Thee: "I have passed away, as I was asked." Thou saidst unto me: "I will bring thee unto Eternal Life, as thou hast asked, for when thou dost see thyself as naught, then will I give unto thee such an existence as thou hast asked."

Every moment now I spend in the loving adoration of Another than myself. Long since I died to mine own existence, and if now I live, it is in the existence of Another. I sacrificed all tranquillity and ease, and renounced all hope of fame, so that I might attain to complete annihilation. I laid down my life and sacrificed my soul, and all mankind became to me as naught—Now I have arisen, and I am free from all grief of soul,

for I am set free from the world of Existence and Non-Existence, and now I dwell beyond both. I have taken my flight from phenomenal existence to non-entity.

I am without body and soul, and surely body and soul are necessary to me. Without these, what am I? I am that which I was meant to be. Within myself, I have no knowledge of myself, for self-less I was meant to be. Happy is he who has thus passed away, for passing away is the essence of abiding. This I know, that Annihilation is a glorious thing, but that which I do not know is what I am yet to be.

## THE UNION OF THE SOUL WITH GOD

Save Thee I see naught in the two worlds, for verily Thou alone dost exist in this world and in that. From everlasting Thou wast and changeless shalt be : unto eternity is Thy Being and shall be for ever. O Thou Who didst make manifest both Time and Place, Thou hast created both the soul of man and the universe wherein he dwells, and Thou dost cause the spheres to revolve and dost make the hearts of thousands to be filled with awe and amazement at Thy manifestation of Thyself.

Now am I made one with Thee, and from that Union my heart is consumed with rapture. From that Union, my tongue is all bewildered.

By Union, I have been merged in the Unity, I am become altogether apart from all else, I am Thou and Thou art I—nay, not I, all is altogether Thou. I have become annihilated, "I" and "Thou" no more exist. We have become one, and I have become altogether Thou.

By union with Thee, I have become the perfected gnostic, and now the gnostic has vanished away and I have become altogether the Creative Truth. I am God! I am God! I am God! I am free from pride and passion and desire. I reveal the Divine Mysteries and thereby I fill the lovers of God throughout the world with amazement, and a hundred thousand creatures remain astonished at me. All forms are consumed in the flames, when the candle of Union with Him is set alight and blazes up.

When the paintings are hidden, then wilt thou see the Painter. O brother, I will tell thee the mystery of mysteries. Know, then, that painting and Painter are one! When thy faith in God is made perfect, thou wilt never see thyself, save in Him.

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